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II DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF EARLY ADULTHOOD IN THE LIGHT OF PSYCHOLOGY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**Zadania rozwojowe wczesnej dorosłości w świetle wybranych
teorii psychologii rozwoju człowieka**

ABSTRACT

Early adulthood is a very difficult period for human psyche. On the one hand, it is the time of reaching full strength, energy and will for activity, but on the other hand, it is the time full of challenges and problems related to taking up new social roles. The young adults have to take crucial and difficult decisions on the aims and tasks they wish to realise and have to solve the dilemmas related to realisation of developmental tasks.

The paper is concerned with the thesis about the universal character of developmental tasks in the period of early adulthood on the basis of well recognised theories of human development. Analysis of selected approaches to the developmental tasks permitted identification of the key issues for correct development in the period of early adulthood and factors supporting their realisation and facilitating assumption of new social roles in the contemporary world.

Key- words: developmental tasks, early adulthood, change

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STRESZCZENIE

Okres wczesnej dorosłości to okres trudnej próby dla ludzkiej psychiki. Z jednej strony jest to czas potrzebny do osiągnięcia pełni sił, potencjału energii i chęci do działania. Z drugiej strony, młodzi dorośli przeżywają całe spektrum trudności związane z wejściem w nowe role społeczne. Z tego powodu są oni zmuszeni do dokonywania trudnych wyborów i rozwiązywania dylematów związanych z realizacją zadań rozwojowych.

W prezentowanym artykule autorki poszukują uniwersalnych zadań rozwojowych w okresie wczesnej dorosłości, zasługujących na miano powszechnych, na gruncie uznanych teorii rozwoju człowieka. Uważna krytyczna analiza wybranych teorii zadań rozwojowych pozwoliła zidentyfikować zadania kluczowe dla prawidłowego przebiegu rozwoju w okresie wczesnej dorosłości oraz czynniki wspomagające ich realizację, a tym samym wchodzenie w role współczesnych dorosłych.

Słowa kluczowe: zadania rozwojowe, wczesna dorosłość, zmiana

INTRODUCTION

Human development is traditionally described in the categories of reorganization and growth in mental and physical aspects. In this framework, the process of development ends the moment an individual achieves a mature psychological structure in the emotional, intellectual and social sphere, and sexual maturity in the biological dimension. The level of function, skill and ability achieved by the individual is maintained throughout adulthood, and decreases steadily as the individual progresses along the timeline until their death. The diminishing level (or scope) of function, or the deterioration (or loss) of certain skills, is regarded as a sign of reversal of the development process, i.e. regressive changes.

Contemporary accounts of human nature, however, tend to abandon this view, claiming that development in addition to growth also encompasses reorganization and sometimes even reduction of both external features and behaviours (Pietrasiński, 1990). This view is particularly interesting because it describes development as a process occurring throughout the entire life course, even after achieving psychosocial and biological maturity. This definition of development gives rise to questions regarding the purpose of developmental changes, and the sense and essence of psychosocial maturity, as the quintessence of biological (physical, sexual) maturity is not subject to much doubt. What are the indicators of psychological maturity at any given level of development, then? Or perhaps it would be more practical to adopt the assumption that maturity is attained in stages whose parameters are defined by the dynamic development context determined, to a major extent, by human genetic make-up and social conditioning? Many development researchers are currently preoccupied with

these questions, however definite answers are not to be expected in the near future. It is also conceivable that the problem might never be finally resolved due to the increasing rate and scope of scientific progress in various areas of reality which cause constant reorganization of our understanding of human nature and the world.

In the approach proposed by life-span developmental psychology, human development is viewed as a *process whereby human mental structure and behaviours are transformed over the entire life course*. This research paradigm has made it possible to extend the scope of developmental studies from early periods of life (infancy, childhood, adolescence) to adulthood, including late adulthood which is commonly referred to as old age.

Defining development as a phenomenon corresponding to the concept of change implies two paths of accounting for the process. The first path accounts for changes occurring throughout human life, arguing that all functions of human psyche and body constitute an inseparable whole. Consequently, different functions and processes coexist side by side. Being mutually dependent, changes in one area trigger off changes in another. Development proceeds in stages, phases or periods (depending on the preferred naming convention and its structural complexity), with each consecutive phase (stage, period) building on the previous one. Even though the approach allows for certain individualization of the development process, proponents of phase-based theories assert that human development follows a universal pattern. Representatives of this research tradition, which psychological literature describes as person-centered approach, include such development scholars as Erikson or Havighurst.

The other model of development, referred to as function-centred, is focused on changes in the progression of different functions. Changes in processes and behaviours occurring throughout human life are discussed separately, in individual dimensions. Researchers concentrate on transformations taking place in different spheres of life, seeking to analyze them over the whole life course. Function-centered models are not particularly significant from the viewpoint of the present discussion. In my opinion, searching for the “perfect” model of development should incorporate an array of variables in a number of configurations in which they coexist, including their transformations in physical and psychological time (both in the individual and social dimensions), as well as historic transitions. For example, studies investigating how an individual performs professional tasks should not ignore the individual’s family life. By the same token, research into indicators of successful family life should also include aspects relating to a people’s health, professional career and so on.

The present article seeks to explore universal developmental tasks that are shared by all contemporary young adults. An analysis and synthesis of selected

developmental task theories has made it possible to distinguish events which are regarded by their originators as significant for the correct advancement of early adulthood, as well as means of accomplishing tasks recognized as optimally necessary for preparing young people for their future life within the society.

EARLY ADULTHOOD AS A PERIOD OF ACCUMULATED TASKS

Adopting the position that there are universal development phases with relatively precisely defined time frames makes it easier for researchers to pinpoint tasks which an individual should accomplish at a certain age. Effective handling of such situations is interpreted as fulfilment of expectations created by the person's environment. At the same time, it serves as an indicator of the person's development.

Early adulthood encompasses the period between 20/23 and 35/40 years of age. Although no precise age limits can be determined for the period, a person does not enter adulthood until the age of complete biological maturity and readiness for full participation in social life. The latter aspect is extremely difficult to gauge and requires the researcher to take into account the development potential which a given person has realized during previous periods of life.

In a study by Jensen (1997), young Americans mentioned the following markers of transition to adulthood: assuming responsibility for one's actions, making decisions based on one's own beliefs and values, achieving independence of parents and other people, and establishing partnership relations with parents. Importantly, such life events as completion of education, marriage or parenthood were not regarded as attributes of adulthood. This probably results from the fact that more and more young adults nowadays postpone not only the decision to start a family but also to begin professional career (Liberska, 2004). The trend is caused by longer educational cycles: today's generation of young adults remains in education longer than their counterparts from previous generations. Another theoretical proposal worth considering is that the essence of adulthood is rooted in a person's conviction that they are ready to fulfil "adult" roles and execute "adult" tasks. In this approach "being an adult" has a subjective – not an objective – dimension. It is the person's confidence that they have entered the world of adults and their knowledge of tasks and roles typically assumed by adults – not taking up the tasks as such – that serve as specific predictors of adult maturity. The assumption of roles and tasks attributed by cultural tradition to adulthood is not a sufficient proof of the person's maturity for their effective fulfilment.

Given the above, is it justifiable to assume that the most accurate and universal indicator of adulthood is subjectively felt readiness to establish a family and take full responsibility for oneself and others, and a sense of autonomy? The feeling of readiness to perform a task which is not followed by actual task performance – just like undertaking an “adult” task without feeling ready – gives no grounds to infer whether the venture will be successful or not.

Convergence of the subjective and objective dimensions, i.e. absence of the sense of adulthood coupled with the lack of activities that are characteristic of adults, results in the individual stopping on the brink of adulthood. This is a negative state not only because it adversely affects personal development but also because it arrests the progress of social structures.

Experiencing the state as more or less uncomfortable, coupled with engagement in activities preparing for tasks and roles typical of adult people, heralds the beginning of adulthood.

Given today's rising level of civilization, the process of transition into adulthood is, as mentioned above, increasingly time- and energy-consuming. On the one hand, it calls for more and more human resources. On the other hand, if circumstances are favourable, it enables a fuller realization of a person's development potential. In the latter case, the postponement observed by a growing number of scholars in taking on adult roles and tasks by young people has a positive dimension both for the individual and the society, because it allows adolescents to prepare better for the reality of the adult world, at the same time securing further development of social structures.

Biotechnological progress, increasingly complex organization of the social world, axiological transformations, as well as the natural framework of human development and capabilities (of biological nature, including genetic aspects) make development researchers rearrange the periodization of human life. Attempts are made to redefine the time frames of consecutive stretches of human life along with their inherent tasks in order to reflect the dynamics of development processes and context transformations more accurately. At the same time, studies are undertaken to explore cultural determinants of variability found in development processes and intracultural variation present in subcultures.

In the USA, a number of interesting insights into the development of adults were described by Levinson (1978). Levinson divides adulthood into several shorter time scales on the basis of content and organization of the activity structure. He distinguishes early adulthood, the time of entering into social roles that are distinctive for a particular culture; middle adulthood, the full bloom of adult life; and late adulthood, marked by diversion of energy from what used to be crucial roles and tasks into new areas that rise in importance at the stage of middle adulthood.

It is during the middle period of adulthood that an individual successfully (as far as their capabilities and objective circumstances allow) performs activities typical of young adults. It can be defined as the time when young people step into roles they are expected to assume in their culture, and see how well they cope with them. The remaining two subperiods of adulthood, early and late, are transitional times which allow the individual a smooth passage from one development stage to the next, serving as temporary protective buffers. The buffers safeguard the temporal space, allowing the individual to make errors in their activity in the process of recognizing newly assumed tasks and roles, and striving to master the required rudimentary skills (in the “entry phase”); or gradually reduce the parameters of activity characteristic for the central phase, and the associated degree of life satisfaction (in the “exit phase”). Thanks to this structure of the development path the individual is able to smoothly assume basic tasks and typical roles predominant at different development stages, and then withdraw from the transitorily dominating roles and tasks following the achievement of life goals consistent with their earlier plans and social expectations for a particular stage of life.

CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENTAL TASK

The concept of developmental task was put forward by R. J. Havighurst (1981). According to Havighurst’s proposed framework, development researchers should focus on the identification of problems that are distinctive for different periods of human life and analyze how these problems could be resolved.

The concepts of developmental tasks assume that there are certain fundamental and universal developmental tasks which each individual realizes over the course of their life. Proper fulfilment of developmental tasks is the most significant indication of development. People who successfully execute tasks normally occurring at a given development stage feel happy because they have accomplished their life goals, developed (or boosted) their sense of capacity and, in the long term, enhanced their self-esteem. As a consequence, they also gain social approval and, in many cases, acquire a sense of punctuality (Trempała, 2000). Finally, the fulfilment of earlier tasks makes it possible to undertake developmental tasks assigned to successive periods of development. In this way an individual is able to achieve (or strengthen) their sense of well-being.

The main precondition for successful realization of developmental tasks is the occurrence of moments of learnability, i.e. times of “the individual’s complete readiness, in biological, motivational and social aspects, for the performance

of tasks” (Waldowski, 2002, p. 57). Failure to complete developmental tasks, or their inadequate or incomplete fulfilment, makes it impossible for the individual to enter the next stage of development, thus hindering the individual’s full involvement in social life. This ultimately makes the person feel unhappy.

A preliminary analysis of developmental task concepts leads to a rather disturbing conclusion that there is only one correct path of development which, when followed, gives the individual a sense of happiness. However, discussing universal tasks which all people should fulfil proponents of developmental task concepts emphasize that the manner in which the tasks are carried out is an individual matter, depending on people’s internal propensities and their idiosyncratic mental structures. An increasing number of researchers currently account for development from the viewpoint of developmental tasks asserting that both the means of task fulfilment and the nature of the tasks are constituted as a result of influences from three sources: somatic maturity, cultural pressures and aspirations developed at earlier stages of development. At this point, a convergence with the approach proposed by Erikson, originator of psychosocial theory of development, becomes evident.

A review of literature on the subject shows that some of the most frequently referenced concepts incorporating the category of developmental task are Robert Havighurst’s and Daniel Levinson’s models.

ROBERT HAVIGHURST’S CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

According to Havighurst (1981), developmental success depends on intellectual, emotional and social competences (compare Newman, Newman, 1979). Major developmental tasks distinguished by Havighurst can be assigned to several categories including: achievement of independence, exchange of feelings, social relationships, sexual roles, physical development, self-awareness and attitude towards oneself and the world. Havighurst developed the categories on the basis of observations and analysis of data gathered in interviews and conversations with scholars specializing in social sciences (after: Przetaczniak-Gierowska, Tyszkowa, 2000). The concept of development task is rooted in Erikson’s theories, primarily in the Eriksonian understanding of an individual’s interactions with the outside world. The assumption is that the time frames within which specific development tasks emerge are defined by the society in which a given person lives and develops. Each society creates conditions that are conducive to a particular sequence of developmental stages. It also has its own

pace at which individuals living in the society progress from one phase/stage of life to the next. The progression pace is set by norms existing in the society, while the fulfilment of developmental tasks is determined by the individual's assumed social roles. At the same time, the process described above is subject to historic changes, while the society itself undergoes structural transformations which have an impact on the pace of individual development (Liberska, 2004). Social norms, at least in their basic aspects, are consistent with norms governing biological development, including sexual maturation, and harmonized with the development of mind structures. If any discrepancies occur, the affected individual is unable to cope with their tasks effectively. Hence it is warranted to discuss development within the framework of developmental task concepts not only from the viewpoint of normative nature of events, tasks or roles, but also their punctuality and synchronism – or asynchrony.

In Robert Havighurst's proposed model of six major stages of development, early adulthood incorporates the following developmental tasks: choosing an occupation, selecting a life partner and learning to live with them, starting and raising a family, managing home, undertaking civic responsibility and finding a congenial social group. It needs to be stressed that – in the opinion of the author of the concept – the above tasks should be completed in line with the sequence presented above (compare Turner, Helms, 1999). However at least some scholars investigating social life point out that contemporary societies are becoming more and more tolerant with regard to deviations from standard time frames established by earlier generations. The increasingly widespread shift from the traditional cultural pattern calls into question the rationale of discussing punctuality in the fulfilment of developmental tasks and analyzing development in normative categories. What are the possible consequences – both for the development of individuals and societies – of the growing divergence between the actual time when developmental tasks are taken on and their “proper” time, considering aspects related to biological maturity, mental frameworks and societal structures? Some sociologists argue that the observed deviations produce adverse effects (Giddens, 2001, Bauman, 2006), though a comprehensive assessment of the phenomenon would require a greater degree of commitment from psychologists to explore consequences for the development of individuals in a broader temporal perspective, covering both the immediate and more remote time scales, and thus offering an opportunity to anticipate the direction of future transformations and their consequences for later generations.

All the tasks which Havighurst classifies as specific to early adulthood refer to interpersonal relations and satisfy important needs such as affiliation or security. Accordingly, completing a development task of embarking on a professional career involves not only the acquisition of new competencies (a period of

training) and learning the ropes in one's new role (e.g. that of a subordinate), but also a broad spectrum of interpersonal relations which an individual enters in new situations and with new people. By realizing the task, more or less successfully, the individual satisfies an range of different needs including the basic need of security (also in the financial aspect), as well as the need of being part of a team, belonging to a group (of co-workers) and being useful (to one's fellow workers or the employer). In this light, young adults who take on and complete developmental tasks acquire positive experiences stemming from social relations. Therefore, the fundamental skill a young adult should master seems to be the ability to derive benefits from relationships established with other people, not only those of the intimate nature, which are distinctive for this development stage.

DANIEL LEVINSON'S CONCEPT OF SEASONS OF LIFE

Similarly to Havighurst's concepts, an analysis of the theoretical model proposed by Levinson (1978) reveals a specific cycle-based structure of life. Human life has a certain activity structure which constitutes a standard model of functioning at a given period of development. Over the course of life, changes occur affecting both the structure of an individual's activity and their links with the outside world which constitute the essential material. The life structure incorporates roles fulfilled by an individual and interpersonal relations resulting from these roles, i.e. in the broadest sense all associations between the individual and the society. The activity structure includes, among others, people's behaviour patterns in successive periods of life. As a result, it describes comprehensively people's ways of functioning – including references to themselves (Pietrasiński, 1990, Gurba, 2005). Each individual realizes their development potential in the "model" structure of activity, assuming attitudes and undertaking activities targeted at the achievement of their values and goals, satisfaction of needs and fulfilment of roles. The development potential encompasses a person's features including temperament, personality, capabilities, interests and other characteristics. A significant element of life structure is socioculture determined by the social class to which a person belongs, the person's occupation and their derivative, i.e. socioeconomic status. Each person's life structure changes in parallel to transformations of roles and relations, however the scope of these changes is limited, since (despite being a unique individual) each person goes through common and universally occurring development phases. Transitions in the life structure affect not only the individual, but also other persons or

institutions. This is due to the fact that people abandoning a particular social role to enter a new one break off (or weaken) some relationships, at the same time starting new relations. This process changes the fabric of sociocultural associations both at the individual and supra-individual level. As a consequence, transformations affect not only the individual but also their surroundings. This account of development is consistent, to a certain degree, with the approach followed by many sociologists – and commonly shared by ecologists – who do not focus on individuals (or even groups of individuals) but rather explore interdependencies existing between them.

Levinson proposed four seasons, or eras, in a person's life, each era consisting of ca. 25 years. Taking into account transitional periods, Levinson divided the era of early adulthood into distinct subperiods called phases: I – early adulthood transition (17-22 years old), II – novice phase, when a new life structure is built (22-28 years), III – transition phase during which the individual becomes accustomed to the new structure (28-33 years) and IV – culminating phase during which the individual becomes fully adjusted to the new life structure (33-40 years) (Gurba, 2005).

Eras are distinguished on the basis of specific social roles, conflicts and relationships formed by the individual. Successive eras overlap, which means that a part of the life cycle proceeds in two eras concurrently, which is referred to as a transitional period. Since the passage from one era to another requires the individual to engage in new roles and tasks, development follows the pattern of alternating periods of stability and instability. Instability is typical for the novice phase of each era, while stability is one of the defining features of culminating phases. In culminating phases people fully and effectively address their normal challenges. Entry into a new life phase, Levinson claims, is a breakthrough moment which sets off the process of reconstruction of the activity structure, at the same time being the driving force for development.

The structure of the life cycle and activities dominating in successive parts (i.e. major roles and key tasks) are similar in all cultures (Bee, 1998). From the developmental point of view, each of the four major eras plays an equally significant role in the life cycle. Consequently, they should not be assigned values or ranked by importance (Pietrasiniński, 1990). They can only be analyzed as an irreversible sequence in the course of developmental changes which not all individuals complete in its entirety.

In early adulthood the individual is tasked with establishing, on the basis of their dreams, a concept of themselves and their life paths, and creating a foundation for autonomous life. If individuals fail to precisely define their dreams, they are unable to set their life goals or specify their life plan. Consequently, they run the risk of stagnation and senselessness of existence. At

later stages of early adulthood the individual – by analyzing their successes and failures in the preceding period – should assess whether their previously defined goals were appropriate and properly suited to the individual's capabilities and the reality of life (Birch, 2009). In early adulthood young people are at the peak of their physical and mental capacity, at the same time being exposed to stressful situations and conflicts generated by new tasks and social roles (Brzezińska, 2005). Consequently, early adulthood is often considered to be one of the most difficult periods in a person's life.³

During transition from the era of adolescence to early adulthood it is necessary to finish two tasks initiated in the former. One of them is to achieve preliminary internal independence (reduction of psychological – including emotional – dependence from parents) and external autonomy (achievement of at least partial financial independence). Consequently, young adults become able to take up responsibility for themselves and act in a fully autonomous manner. Another task that needs accomplishment is consideration of one's values, goals and aspirations which are then used as guide posts in adult life.

In the early adulthood era occurring immediately after transition and before culmination a young person is expected to consolidate their values and achieve a compromise between them and universally shared standards and rules of behaviour adopted by the society to which the person belongs. It is also the time when people gather experiences by participating in different situations that are specific to adult life, explore possibilities offered by the world around them – while realizing their limitations and making effort to reduce their impact – and choose the most suitable occupation, partner, lifestyle, etc.

In the culminating period of the era of early adulthood the individual is confronted with two developmental tasks: stabilization of the structure developed in the preceding phase and improvement of already shaped life structures. The tasks should be undertaken in order to build a more effective and more rewarding life structure in a person's relationship with a partner, job, community and social life (Turner and Helms, 1999). Levinson underscores that the culmination of early adulthood is a time of regular activity largely focused on other people, based on the sense of responsibility and duty. People are concerned about improving their activity and gaining social approval.

In Levinson's concept, an important role in shaping the life structure of a young person entering early adulthood belongs to a mentor. Mentoring

³ Each era, however, repeats the same pattern of reconstruction of activity structures. Also, each era may potentially involve discrepancies between the fulfilment potential and typical activity patterns. This constant model of changes, with an embedded problem of synchronization, is another argument in favour of the thesis assuming that all the eras are equally important.

means assisting a young adult in the process of self-definition and making choices, for example with regard to professional career. Mentors are usually older or more experienced people who enjoy the trust of their “apprentices” in the world of adults.

Another interesting concept within Levinson’s adulthood model is that of the “dream”. Oleś (2000) claims that the notion is equivalent to the *expected concept of life* which develops for various areas of activity when a person moves into early adulthood. During this period, the individual is eager to experiment and explore the reality more or less intensively to verify whether their dream model of adult life is possible to achieve given their personal resources and those of the environment. Half-way through the early adulthood era the individual, on the basis of experiments, should determine their preferred lifestyle and goals for the future, as well as developing the virtues of autonomy and independence. These are necessary prerequisites for realizing dreams and aspirations in later periods of early adulthood. During early adulthood, women’s dreams typically revolve around professional career and family life, however they vary depending on the most preoccupying sphere of life. For example, women who are focused mainly on their professional career cherish dreams about enriching their family life. On the other hand, women who are predominantly engaged in household activities tend to dream of professional development. The greatest obstacle in the pursuit of their dreams, women claim, are their partners (Roberts, Newton, after: Oleś, 2000).⁴ As Levinson points out, young men usually dream of a successful career and autonomy. Women in their dreams are mainly hearth-keepers who support them in achieving their professional and financial ambitions, etc. My own research shows that young men put a greater value on their autonomy than close interpersonal relationships. It is only at a later period in their development that this order of importance becomes reversed (Liberska, Malina, 2009).

ERIK ERIKSON’S CONCEPT OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Even though Erikson’s theory of development does not include the notion of *task* as such, his central category is a functionally similar concept of psychological dilemmas which an individual should resolve during eight successive stages of psychosocial development. At each stage of development, Erikson points out, an

⁴ This brings to attention the problem of accounting for this interesting association based on Erikson’s concept, by referring to the dilemma between isolation and intimacy, and means of resolving the dilemma.

individual is faced with a crisis which they are expected to resolve. If successfully overcome, the crisis leads to the acquisition of new competencies and skills, preparing the individual for coping with the next crisis. This is only possible if a pro-development solution is selected. Choosing a different option or failing to resolve the crisis makes it possible to effectively overcome the crisis in the next phase of life or halts the individual's development in that phase. If the individual does not combat the crisis in a pro-developmental way, they experience a feeling of dissatisfaction and their development at later life stages will proceed in an atypical way. Erikson thus assigns a potential development value to crisis. Crisis is viewed in positive terms as an indispensable element of development which allows the individual to become more mature (Tatala, 2003). Psychosocial development goes through critical turning points, i.e. moments determining progress and regress, integration and impediment of development (Erikson, 1997).

Consecutive phases of development do not follow in a strict temporal sequence. Every person has their own time schedule specifying the course of developmental phases (compare Larsen, Buss, 2002, Hall, Lindzey and Campbell, 2004). Even though there is no universal temporal schedule, development phases proceed along standard lines and have a universal nature: they are shared by people in all cultures and societies. Erikson placed a high importance on social factors of development which co-create standards of *being and becoming a human*. Not all contemporary development researchers accept the claim that development norms (of being and becoming) are timeless and universal – partially due to cultural transitions, changes in social structures and regulation over the course of history (Tillmann, 2006).

Early adulthood, which is equivalent to the sixth development stage in Erikson's model, is distinctive for the emergence of crisis between intimacy and isolation. The author of the concept defines intimacy as the ability to fuse one's own identity with that of another (close) person, without fear of losing a part of oneself, one's independence or autonomy. In this way, young people develop a secure feeling of being "us", without being afraid of losing their own "self".

In this phase of development, therefore, people should gain the ability to enter into an intimate relationship with another person and assume responsibility for it. It is thus necessary to find a partner to share life with. People who fail to cope with the task run the risk of social isolation. At this stage of development adults have a relatively well-developed personality and identity, and possess the ability to fully experience physical and psychological closeness with another human being. Contrary to adolescence, an intimate relationship formed by young (and older) adults is not limited to the physical sphere. Sexual relations undertaken with an expectation of permanence are – in Erikson's view – fuller. They are richer and more complete because, among other factors, a true union between

partners enhances their individual personalities. A young adult's belief that they have entered into a lifelong relationship with their partner makes them more concerned about cultivating their feelings, caring about their partner and being faithful. At the same time, however, young adults should also seek relationships with other people, not necessarily of an intimate nature, to satisfy other needs, including that of affiliation. In this way, they prepare for sharing their joys, fears, successes, skills etc. with others, thus raising their chances for handling the generativity crisis typical for the next development phase in a manner that fosters development.

Effective resolution of the crisis between isolation and intimacy has a favourable impact on the individual's future life. Inadequate handling of the crisis, as mentioned above, results in the feeling of loneliness and avoidance of close relationships with others. In the long-term, such situation is likely to trigger problems with generativity. The usual source of difficulty with resolving the crisis occurring in the sixth stage of development is inadequately developed identity (Gurba, 2005) and gender-related differences in functioning, particularly when it comes to communication between women and men. Women tend to regard sharing problems, thoughts and desires with their partner as an aspect of intimacy, whereas men rarely feel the need to engage in such activities. The differences sometimes make the relationship unsatisfactory for both partners.

Pro-developmental choice of intimacy is related to affiliative ritualization which – Erikson asserts – is the culturally recognized form of ritual specific to the phase of early adulthood. The aim of affiliative ritualization is to share labour, love and friendship with close people. On the other hand, a characteristic ritualism (a distorted form of ritual) is elitism which is expressed in the development of exclusive rituals constituting a form of collective narcissism (Hall, Lindzey i Campbell, 2004: 213). A presumption emerges that elitism is associated, at least to some extent, with failure to resolve the dilemma in a non-developmental manner, i.e. choice of social isolation.

It is interesting to note that the entry into marriage is not the only way to deal with the crisis between intimacy and isolation in a pro-developmental way. Young adults often start rewarding friendships which partially satisfy their intimacy-related needs. In this context, intimacy is not viewed as a relation based on sexual attraction but rather as the sharing of intimacy in the sphere of mental experiences unrelated to sexual experiences, free from any erotic undertones. Young adults open up to others, sharing experiences, concerns and joys with them, and organizing their time together.

Results of the study by Farrell and Rosenberg (1981) demonstrate a certain significant limitation of Erikson's concept. The two researchers investigated various aspects of identity of men in their early and middle adulthood in order

to verify Erikson's human development model. Their research produced the following findings: in general terms, the theoretical model in which successful resolution of crisis at one stage of development has a favourable effect on the execution of developmental tasks at further stages was confirmed. At the same time, however, a number of interesting deviations from that general principle were noted. For example, some of the study subjects – despite failing to resolve dilemmas emerging at previous periods of development – were still able to deal successfully with the construction of their professional identity. The departure from the previously confirmed principle was put down to the powerful effect of professional context on the development of the concept of “self” by men. At the same time, however, men analyzed in the study had the greatest difficulty with addressing the crisis between isolation and intimacy, and with developing the virtue of love. These problems, in turn, can be attributed to sociocultural requirements applying to men (Oleś, 2003, Liberska, Malina, 2009).

Summing up, Erikson's model is embedded in a specific sociohistorical context. Consequently, it may not apply in other conditions. Limitations of the model become particularly evident in periods of dynamic cultural transformations.

All the concepts discussed above (originated by Havighurst, Levinson and Erikson) share some common points. They set similar paths of human activity in early adulthood and point to their parallel foundations. The concepts compared in the study assume a fixed sequence of tasks. Different tasks are not uniquely related to development periods, while their occurrence depends on the fulfilment of tasks which were characteristic for previous periods and which are significant for handling the next. The nature and time of task realization depend on social norms and they are accommodated within basic forms and areas of activity that are specific to our cultural sphere including: education and acquisition of financial resources for living, starting and raising a family, as well as active participation in social life (Pietrasiński, 1990). Resolution of developmental tasks, central to Havighurst's and Levinson's concepts, is associated with the resolution of crisis between isolation and intimacy explored by Erikson. Overcoming crisis thus becomes a developmental task. Achievement of the virtue of love or affiliative ritualization can also be classified as a developmental task. At the same time, developmental tasks discussed by Havighurst and Levinson are sources of crisis. It is only their realization that allows the individual to reach full adulthood and properly participate in social life.

A comparative analysis of the concepts makes it possible to distinguish four general areas within which developmental tasks of young adults are accommodated. They are: professional, intimate, social and health-related spheres.

- *PROFESSIONAL SPHERE* covers such detailed tasks as: choice of occupation, professional development – promotion ladder, taking professional risks, job challenges, commitment to work, job satisfaction, activities aimed at enhancing the professional status, one's self-perception as a worker, reconciliation of professional and family life, perception of professional future;
- *INTIMATE SPHERE* incorporates the following detailed tasks: way of seeking a partner, problem-solving strategies, crisis resolution within a relationship, handling jealousy, relations with the partner's family and friends, sexual life, satisfaction with one's relationship, commitment to maintain the relationship, closeness to one's partner, showing feelings, entry into extramarital relationships, perception of marital future;
- *SOCIAL SPHERE* includes the following detailed tasks: social activity, maintaining friendships, need to establish friendships and means of finding new friends, ways to realize social life, attitude to friends, meaning of friendship, perception of the future of friendships;
- *HEALTH-RELATED SPHERE* incorporates the following detailed tasks: health condition, care about one's health, activities towards health improvement, health-harming factors, perception of one's future health including attitude to death.

MEANS OF DEVELOPMENTAL TASK ACHIEVEMENT

On the one hand, early adulthood is a time when a person achieves their full powers and energy potential, wants to and is able to take up activities. On the other hand, however, it is a time when difficulties mount as young adults experience the whole spectrum of problems related to their entry into new social roles and undertaking new tasks. Consequently, people are sometimes forced to make choices and resolve dilemmas relating to the developmental tasks they set out to accomplish (Brzezińska, 2002). It seems, though, that the situation of “mature modernity” has brought changes in terms of realization of basic developmental tasks of early adulthood, thus making it necessary to redefine fundamental concepts and dominant activities. Globalization is a time when risky and unclear situations or threats encountered by the individual acquire a new dimension, setting off wider-reaching consequences in the form of transformations of subjectivity and global social organization (compare Giddens, 2008). This remodels the structure of the individual's life – a process not yet properly explored by psychologists. Therefore, it is difficult to make

generalizations and construct a model of development which not only accounts for the changes that have already occurred but also makes it possible to forecast future transformations. Shaky value system, regarded as one of the most serious negative trends affecting contemporary societies, leads to difficulties with self-definition because of inability to find guide posts in life. Consequently, young people may experience disturbances in the crisis handling process and, as a result, fail to take on tasks and roles traditionally associated with early adulthood, undertake them at an inappropriate time or develop other ways of their realization.

“The fact that people, conditioned by their biology and by the society, set up a family and start a job, determines in a general way the repertoire of their actions” (Pietrasiniński, 1990: 73). Together, they make up the individual's activity targeted at the achievement of developmental tasks. Even though developmental tasks faced by healthy adults seem to be universal, the ways in which they are pursued depend on the individual's traits and their general situation. Social phenomena, transformations affecting basic social roles and the emergence of new roles make it necessary for the individual to adjust to the changing social environment. Changing situations thus change the way the individual functions. Consequently, it seems necessary to explore and describe factors related to the effective management of developmental tasks by contemporary young adults.

Implementation of developmental tasks, according to Levinson, is influenced both by social factors (e.g. social expectations, stereotypes) and individual aspects (i.e. achievements made at earlier phases of development, style of attachment, sense of control, self-esteem, personality traits, lifestyle) (Siciński, 1976). Their effect, however, has not yet been sufficiently verified.

Another factor involved in the realization of fundamental developmental tasks is related to life goals. Their achievement gives the individual a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction, thus contributing to future successful development (Soińska, 2002). Whether an individual is able to accomplish previously defined and accepted developmental tasks or not depends, as Łoś (1997) claims, mainly on the adequacy of internal and external means required for task achievement and the individual's capacity to be in command of their own state and control the side-effects of their activity. The adequacy of internal and external means of task accomplishment should, according to that author, be viewed as the individual's skill and ability to use their qualifications (internal adequacy) and environmental conditions (external adequacy).

In general, the means by which tasks are realized is determined by broadly understood external aspects such as historical time, cultural context, social situation or its dynamics. Consequently, the means vary between generations. Even though developmental tasks are universal for contemporary young adults

in our civilization, the way they are fulfilled depends on sex, socioeconomic status, neighbourhood, world view, random events, ecological disasters, etc.

In the light of considerations presented above, it seems justified to adopt the thesis that young adults follow a multitude of life paths filled with goals stemming from traditional developmental tasks and reflecting new directions of development which result from the modification of the former, or their rejection and replacement with other tasks, unknown to preceding generations.

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